

AN ADEQUATE RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The principle objectives involved in the management of records include such major functional areas as 1) records creation control-creating adequate records for documentary purposes and preventing the creation of unnecessary records; 2) records maintenance control-establishing uniform procedures and systems for maintaining current and semi-current records; and 3) records disposition control - including retirement, preservation and disposal of records. In a unified records management program these functions are integrated, continuous and overlapping.

Generally, published manuals are the source through which the various activities of a records management program are controlled. Such manuals serve as a guide and source of basic information to the various organizational units to insure continuity and uniformity of the records management program. In addition, they serve as a tool for coordinating and outlining agency-wide policies and procedures regarding creation of records, systems for receiving, processing and routing incoming and outgoing communications; standardization of methods, procedures, equipment and supplies for maintaining current records; compilation of lists and schedules describing the records and specifying the period of retention for each; use of lists and schedules, resulting from information developed through inventory and appraisal of records, when determining disposition of inactive records; depositories for receiving inactive records and authority and techniques for reproduction of records by microphotography where practical.

In the following paragraphs there will be presented broad, general statements of the functional areas involved in a records management program.

RECORDS CREATION (CONTROL)

This function fundamentally is concerned with the control of the creation of records to assist in the continuous effective operation of the Agency; an adequate and a proper recording of its functions, organization, policies, decisions and procedures; and, the protection of the legal rights of the government and people affected by government activities; as well as making certain that paper work is reduced to a minimum by preventing the creation of unnecessary records. Therefore, to keep records at a minimum quantity, to develop economical and intelligible format, to reduce the number of copies prepared, and to eliminate duplication, a records creation control program requires planning as to how an agency's activities shall be recorded and what procedures involving paper work shall be devised so that there will be adequate documentation with strict elimination of non-essential documents.

(A) Control of Correspondence Which includes coordination of correspondence throughout the Agency and utilization of form letters, pattern letters, pattern paragraphs, procedural guides, limitation or elimination of copies.

The objectives of control on correspondence are to insure that only requested and essential information is transmitted, that form letters are used for frequently requested information, that only the necessary number of copies are made, and that each prescribed copy has a definitely planned use and disposition.

(B) Control of Reports (administrative) which includes coordination of the reporting systems of the Agency to eliminate overlapping and duplication of facts and elimination of obsolete reports, unessential copies, too frequent reporting and unessential filing of reports.

The objectives of a reports control program are to reduce the volume of reports and to simplify and improve necessary reports; eliminate and prevent unnecessary or duplicate reporting; insure that instructions, forms and procedures for necessary reporting are clear and complete and that they provide the most simple and direct methods of reporting; and insure that the contents of required reports provide adequate data for intended purposes; and that proper reporting intervals are established.

(C) Control of Forms which includes coordination of the forms control program with other activities of the Agency to insure uniformity and simplicity in recording, transmitting, reporting, and data processing of its functions.

A forms control program provides for review, analysis, revision and improvement of all existing or proposed forms of an agency with a view toward effecting greater economy and efficiency in the design, production and use of forms by reducing the amount and complexity of paper work; eliminating unnecessary forms or forms that no longer serve their original purpose; preventing duplication of data by combining duplicate or overlapping forms; creating the least essential number of copies; designing forms in conformity with established forms designs standards such as arrangement, spacing, sequence, placement, etc.; making certain that size and format are suited to office procedures and filing equipment and providing for segregation and disposal of those forms of only temporary value.

(D) Control of Mechanical Facilities which relates to the application of office machines and equipment to records creation. This program is directly concerned with the proper utilization of office devices, such as microfilm, tabulating equipment, duplicating equipment, etc., and provides for reducing to a minimum clerical operations, filing cabinet and storage space.

RECORDS MAINTENANCE (CONTROL)

This function is concerned with the establishment and maintenance of clearly defined channels through which paper work flows from the time it is received until it reaches the action desk and with the establishment and maintenance of uniform procedures and systems for filing and maintaining current and non-current records, whether centralized or decentralized, so they will be readily accessible when required.

(A) Location of Records Facilities. Records constitute the basic administrative tools by means of which the work of the Agency is accomplished, an important factor is that of maintaining them in a place in which they can be used to the best advantage. Their subsequent values for recurring administrative use, historical information and possible claims against the government are a few of the considerations necessary in determining the best location and arrangement of the files and records.

(B) The establishment and maintenance of a standard, uniform system for classifying (coding) and filing records, including finding media.

The basic principle of filing involves the placing of papers in a file by the use of a classification system for storage and reference and the providing of specific clues for locating such papers when required. Such systems are based on an analysis of the record material to determine types (groups and series) and are arranged by the subject matter content in order to provide for groups of related material in logical arrangement. Usually, the classification plan provides a system of codes and symbols for identification and reference purposes and generally is known by the markings used, such as the decimal system, the subject-numeric system, alphabetical-numerical system, etc. aside from files such as these, there are many kind of special files which are provided for by selected filing schemes, such as comparatively large series by name, number, or some other order according to the type of record and the use made of it.

(C) The development of standardized methods and procedures for processing and filing records.

This phase of a records program involves the standardization of file room practices, including methods of handling, classifying, indexing, filing and finding. Instructions regarding these filing operations describe in detail the filing procedures to follow, and are included in manuals as specifications for all records operations.

Such manuals become procedural guides for records clerks, training textbooks for new records clerks and basis of authority for the methods and procedures used for filing operations.

(D) The development of procedures for receiving, recording and routing incoming and outgoing communications.

Generally, instructions and operating procedures relating to these functions are incorporated in manuals which provide for well-organized and uniform plans and standardized procedures for the logical order in which various processes take place while handling incoming and outgoing communications and documents. These instructions have many purposes, i.e., to insure speed and accuracy, to prevent deviations from prescribed channels and to make readily available any communication that has been written or received.

(E) The control of filing equipment and supplies.

The scientific use of office equipment in a file room will return dividends in the form of better service and lower personnel costs. The proper selection of equipment can be used as a tool for carrying out an efficient program. The elimination of time consumed in continually discussing types of equipment to be bought is an important saving that can be brought about through planning and standardization.

RECORDS DISPOSITION (CONTROL)

This function is concerned with all sections taken with respect to the elimination of useless records, transfer of records to temporary storage, reduction of records by microphotography and transfer of records to an archival facility. In the development of this phase of the program consideration is given to all applicable laws, orders and regulations, including acts of Congress applicable to the removal or disposal of records generally and those applicable to the Agency specifically. Records cannot be disposed of without authorization of Congress, either by the submission of lists or schedules through the National Archives to Congress for approval, or through the adoption of general schedules initiated by the National Archives and approved by Congress.

Generally, records serving the primary administrative, legal and fiscal purposes for which they are created and accumulated are retained for a period in the creating offices and are scheduled for disposition at specific periods. When these purposes have been served, records of temporary or uncertain value are transferred to a records center, where they are administered or screened, processed and serviced pending either destruction or inclusion among the

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agency archives; while those known to have permanent values are transferred directly to the archival facility.

(A) Records Disposal Schedules. The usual method of controlling records disposal is through the compilation of schedules and lists which provide legal authorization for the systematic removal and disposal of designated series of records after specified periods of time. Schedules or lists are written plans, based on the analysis and evaluation of information obtained through inventories and appraisals of records. These schedules are an expression of disposal policies and are the basis for the writing of an agency disposition manual.

(B) Records Control Schedules. Appraisal of records has two major purposes: (1) identification of records of continuing or permanent value, and (2) identification of records that are disposable immediately or later. On the basis of information developed, comprehensive or control schedules are developed for internal use. These schedules include a listing of all records of an office and indicate the action to be taken with respect to each records series when it becomes non-current. Such action would involve the identification of those records not having sufficient value to justify their further retention; the identification of those records to be transferred to the records center; and the identification of those records to be retained in office space. Upon identification, specific plans are made for their further protection, whether for destruction or preservation.

MICROPHOTOGRAPHY

This process has various applications in all phases of records work. In maintenance control, it has its greatest use in the reduction of volume of records holdings which process is instrumental in the reduction of space and equipment requirements. In addition, microphotography is used in providing security or "insurance" copies of records that will exist if the originals are destroyed. In the disposition phase of records management, the process is used to make reproductions of permanently valuable records.

TRAINING

Training programs in records management activities are developed to meet specific needs. For example, it is necessary to train file room operators upon the installation or modification of a filing system. This program is continuous to the extent of training new people. The development of manuals and procedural guides are useful in this respect, however, organized programs are essential.

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